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CZECHOSLOVAK LEATHER AND RUBBER INDUSTRY FULFILLS ITS GOALS

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Czechoslovak Leatherworking and Rubber Plants

The Czechoslovak leather and rubber industry has always been dependent on imports of basic raw materials from western countries. After the February session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, thousands of workers, technicians, and white-collar workers started to work to implement the party's decision to reorient industry toward heavy production and thus emancipate the country's economy from its dependence on the capitalist countries.

To carry out this task, it was necessary to change the trend of the leather and rubber industry by dropping exports which put Czechoslovakia in a position of untenable dependence on the West, and by cutting imports to a considerable extent. At the same time, supplies for the domestic market, especially of shoes, had to be maintained and improved.

The solution of these problems required that the leather industry find substitutes for imported hides, primarily cowhides. The industry's research laboratories have found a suitable method for using pigskin. The difficulty encountered in using this raw material for shoes lies in its porosity. Shoes and leather goods were first produced from pigskin, and lately pigskin suede has been produced. This latter product is of such quality that it can replace goatskin and calfskin suede leather. Research work is still going on to improve the quality of this leather further.

Experimental manufacture of pigskin glove leather has been equally successful, and in the second quarter of 1950, regular production was begun. The successful solution of this problem has made possible the manufacture of gloves for the workers in heavy industry.

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Particular attention has been given by research to testing synthetic and plastic materials for making footwear. This problem has been virtually solved; small-scale manufacture has begun, and production of some shoes from synthetic and plastic materials is envisaged in the plan for 1951.

As a result of this, imports of raw hides have been reduced, and the 1951 plan provides for a further reduction. This reduction has been achieved by replacing imported raw materials with domestic ones and by cutting down on exports of leather shoes. Similarly, a basic change has been made in imports of tanning and other auxiliary materials for the leather industry. The proportional consumption of spruce bark and synthetic tanning materials has been increased. The result will be that in 1951, the leather industry will be almost entirely emancipated from its dependence on imports from capitalist countries.

The February session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party furnished the rubber industry, too, with clear directives for the efficient use of imported raw materials, and the industry has directed all its efforts toward fulfilling these instructions. At first, a way had to be found to replace natural rubber with synthetic. Then, the conversion to synthetic rubber processing called for a considerable amount of work by the factory research laboratories and, at the same time, an enlargement and adjustment of the mechanical equipment.

In tire production the importance of maintaining quality without having to change production conditions has been stressed. Much attention has been devoted to reorientation in other raw materials, particularly carbon black.

At present, the possibility of shifting some products formerly made of rubber to production from plastics is being examined; this would enable a more economic use of foreign exchange. A further limitation is also planned of the production of certain luxury goods which require natural rubber.

The plastics industry, the youngest section of the leather and rubber industry, shows an upward trend. In 1950, production in this industry was 350 percent of the 1948 level; in 1951, it will reach 550 percent of that amount. The main task of this industry is to replace imported raw materials. Principal attention is being devoted to finding satisfactory substitutes for leather, natural rubber, nonferrous metals, cotton, some kinds of rare wood, and other raw materials.

The plastic finding the widest use is polyvinylchloride, which is suitable for producing industrial goods, as well as for textiles, wrapping materials, and home furnishings. Stamped goods of polyvinylchloride may be successfully used for producing automobile gaskets, insulating material, etc. The use of Novodur has been found very practical because this material often surpasses in quality metal goods, especially those of nonferrous metals. Wherever there is no need for resistance to high pressures and temperatures of over 60 degrees centigrade, products of Novodur may be safely used. For this reason, it is planned to make pipes, profiles, valves, bars, plates, and all manner of industrial goods from this material. Novodur's resistance to chemical influences such as acids and bases makes its increased production desirable.

At present, plastics production is scattered over several production branches. To improve development and utilization of plastics in all branches of industry, it would be well to concentrate tool manufacturing and plastics pressing as much as possible in one industry.

Polyvinylchloride has already successfully replaced some nonferrous metals. For example, the filters for vinegar factories, formerly made of steel and now made of polyvinylchloride, have greater durability than the old brass filters. Recently, the plastics industry has been using polyvinylchloride for linings of gutters in cowsheds.

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To raise the quality of products, a quality contest has been introduced in all national enterprises, to be sponsored by the enterprises themselves. Complaints have been received on the quality of leather produced. These complaints were due to the poor durability of dressing materials, which was caused mainly by the fact that the quality of pigments was not satisfactory and that they were delivered by several suppliers. This will be corrected by concentrating on high-quality production and by instituting a system of central supply for the tanneries.

Other achievements of the industry include the production of chloroprene synthetic leather, production of soles and welts from polyvinylchloride, production of various acrylates, etc.

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